

CAPTAIN WALTER M. SCHIRRA, JR., UNITED STATES NAVY

Walter Marty Schirra, Jr., was born in Hackensack, New Jersey, on March 12, 1923, son of Walter M. and Florence (Leach) Schirra. He attended Dwight Morrow High School in Englewood, New Jersey and Newark (New Jersey) College of Engineering, for one year, prior to entering the U. S. Naval Academy, Annapolis, Maryland, on appointment from the Seventh District of his native state in 1942. Graduated and commissioned Ensign on June 6, 1945, he subsequently advanced in rank, attaining that of Captain, to date from July 1, 1965.

Following graduation from the Naval Academy in 1945, he joined the USS ALASKA. In April 1946 he was detached for duty until December of that year as Operations Briefing Officer on the Staff of Commander SEVENTH Fleet. Ordered to the Naval Air Station, Pensacola, Florida, he completed flight training and in June 1948 was designated Naval Aviator. He was then assigned to Fighter Squadron SEVENTY-ONE, serving as Administrative, Material and Maintenance Officer.

From February 1951 until January 1952, as an exchange pilot to the U. S. Air Force, he had duty as a Flight Leader with the 136th Bomber Wing and as Operations Officer with the 154th Fighter Bomber Squadron, both units based at Taegu, Korea. In a F-84E he flew combat in Korea, completing ninety missions and was credited with one MIG-15 shot down and two damaged. He was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross and the Air Medal with Oak Leaf Cluster in lieu of the Second Air Medal by the Air Force.

Returning to the United States, he reported in February 1952, as Air-to-Air Missile Officer at the Naval Ordnance Test Station, Inyokern, California, where he was engaged in the development of the "Sidewinder" missile. He remained there until February 1954, when he joined Fleet Aircraft Service Squadron TWELVE. In that assignment he participated in Project CUTLASS (F7U3) as Project Pilot and Project STEAM on board the USS HANCOCK. The HANCOCK was the first carrier of the United States Fleet with steam catapults capable of launching high performance jet planes. She conducted carrier operation evaluations in readying the new Cutlass aircraft for eventual assignment to Fleet squadrons.

In October 1954 he reported as an Instructor attached to Composite Squadron THREE (Transitional Training Unit, Pacific) and in April 1956 transferred to Fighter Squadron ONE HUNDRED TWENTY FOUR to serve as Operations Officer. Attached to the USS LEXINGTON, he flew F3H-2N Demons in the Pacific Area. Between September and December 1957 he attended Air Safety Officer School at the University of Southern California at Los Angeles. He was next ordered to the Naval Air Test Center, Patuxent River, Maryland, and there had test pilot training and later participated in suitability development work on the F4H.

He was one of seven military test pilots selected in April 1959, by the National Aeronautics and Space Administration to participate in Project MERCURY--the United States manned satellite program.

On October 3, 1962, in his SIGMA 7 spacecraft, he successfully completed a six-orbit journey around the earth in nine hours and thirteen minutes, attaining a peak altitude of one hundred and seventy five miles and traveled almost 144,000 statute miles before reentry into the earth's atmosphere. He landed approximately nine thousand yards from the recovery ship USS KEARSARGE. Electing to stay in his spacecraft, he was hoisted aboard the KEARSARGE, a little more than one-half hour after he landed in the waters of the Pacific about 275 miles northeast of Midway Island. He was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross with the following citation:

"For heroism and extraordinary achievement...as an Astronaut with NASA on October 3, 1962 aboard SIGMA 7. Captain (then Commander) Schirra was in flight for 9.2 hours for a total of six orbits. As this was an engineering flight, he concerned himself primarily with the management and operation of the spacecraft's systems to conserve hydrogen peroxide attitude control fuel and electrical power..."

He has since served as backup command pilot for the GEMINI III mission and, on December 15-16, 1965, he occupied the command pilot seat on the history-making GEMINI VI flight. The highlight of this mission was when GEMINI VI successfully rendezvoused with the already orbiting GEMINI VII spacecraft, thus accomplishing the first rendezvous of two manned maneuverable spacecraft and establishing another space "first" for the United States. Known as a "textbook" pilot, he remained in the spacecraft following his MERCURY and GEMINI flights and is the first astronaut to be brought aboard recovery ships twice in this manner. "For heroism and extraordinary achievement...as an Astronaut with NASA on December 15, 1965 aboard GEMINI VI..." he was awarded a Gold Star in lieu of the Third Distinguished Flying Cross. The citation further states in part:

"While serving as Command Pilot, Captain (then Commander) Schirra was in flight for twenty-five hours and fifty-one minutes for a total of fifteen orbits. He returned on December 16, 1965 and rendezvoused within about 120 feet of GEMINI VII, accomplishing the feat of a controlled reentry to a predetermined landing point..."

He was Commander of the Spacecraft, APOLLO 7, during the first manned orbital flight of the APOLLO Program. Launched on October 12, 1968, the manned spacecraft orbited the earth one hundred and sixty three times in eleven day, splashing down three hundred and thirty miles southeast of Bermuda on October 22. The recovery ship for this landing was the USS ESSEX. He was awarded the Distinguished Service Medal and cited as follows:

"For exceptionally meritorious service...as Commander of the Spacecraft, APOLLO 7, during the first manned orbital flight of the APOLLO Program, from October 11 to 22, 1968. Responsible for the control and coordination of all assigned evolutions during the flight, Captain Schirra demonstrated outstanding courage, extraordinary technical competence, and superb professional skill in earth-orbital flight, resulting in a most successful milestone in the progress of the APOLLO Program, and greatly enhancing the United States potential for further explorations in space. By his unprecedented achievement, intrepid leadership, and peerless devotion to duty, Captain Schirra rendered valuable and distinguished service to the Government of the United States..."

In addition to the Distinguished Service Medal, the Distinguished Flying Cross with two stars and Air Medal with Oak Leaf Cluster, awarded by the Air Force, Captain Schirra has received two NASA Distinguished Service Medals; the NASA Exceptional Service Medal; the Navy Astronaut Wings; the Distinguished Alumnus Award from the Newark College of Engineering; the Collier Trophy; SETP Kincheloe Award; AIAA Award; and the American Astronautical Society Flight Achievement Award. He is co-recipient of the 1966 Harmon Aviation Trophy. His campaign ribbons include: American Campaign Medal; Asiatic-Pacific Campaign Medal; World War II Victory Medal; Navy Occupation Service Medal, Asia Clasp; China Service Medal; National Defense Service Medal with bronze star; Korean Service Medal; and the United Nations Service Medal. He also has the Korean Presidential Unit Citation Badge.

He has accumulated more than 3,895 hours flying time, with 2,639 hours in jet aircraft.

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His father, a World War I ace in the Army Air Corps, and mother barnstormed throughout the Eastern United States in a light plane after the first World War.

